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The Art Gallery

American Art Galleries.*

VIII.

COLLECTION OF WILLIAM T. WALTERS, ESQ.

SECOND NOTICE.



NE is surprised, in running over in the mind the principal stars of the Walters gallery, at the wealth of pictures that have been accepted as wonders, and have been written about. Gallait's "Oubli des Douleurs," Gérôme's "Duel after the Masquerade," Delaroche's floating "Christian Martyr" and his mighty "Hemicycle," Gleyre's "Illusions Perdues," even Vibert's "Gulliver," and Jalabert's "Orpheus," are pictures of literary interest, and lending themselves to literary expression. See, for instance, how Sir Arthur Helps has made capital out of a painting we were considering in the last paper, the Gleyre; he wants to make an effect of mystery, of glorification, of a beatified female head floating by in the memory of a man, triumphant among the crowding phantoms of his youth; and what will lend him such a lustrous spot of color for his palette as the Gleyre of the Luxembourg? Thus the dainty author develops its motive in his "Friends in Council": "There is a picture in Paris, at the palace of the Luxembourg, called 'Les Illusions Perdues.' A noble figure of a man in the prime of life, or rather beyond the prime of life, when the leaf is just beginning to turn yellow at the edges, is sitting on a marble quay. His head leans forward, his arms fall down in utter dejection. It is sunset. A bark is putting off from the quay. And the bark is crowded with gay minstrels, happy children, and bright-eyed damsels. 'Youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm.' Nobody regards him, the dejected man. Nor does he look at them. He has just glanced at them. They are not, however, in his thoughts. But they have brought back, in long array, what Tennyson calls 'portions and parcels of the dreadful past.' It is to my mind one of the most affecting pictures I have ever seen, but that is not its particular merit in my eyes. One of the girls in the centre of the boat, who is leaning her head upon her hand and looking upward, is the image of what my Alice was." Thus does a clever and refined writer, wanting to impress the loveliness of his heroine on the reader, seize a whole painted mythology, as it were, to form an ideal atmosphere for her. To stamp upon the memory of the public a glimpse or a reminiscence of that great picture is to save himself many pages of description of his Alice. Nor is the literary man's analysis of a world of art quite without discernment. It is a subtle fancy to make the man in the picture really see mere humanities, and nothing more, "minstrels, children and damsels"—while what he thinks he sees are seraphs, cupids and muses; and for the painter to have painted what the dreamer thinks he sees, the glorified company, not the real one. Again,

how the literary men have exulted in Gérôme's subject of the "Masked Duel." Its theme is literary in quality, and to describe it is as interesting as to paraphrase one of Balzac's stories; the London hack quills liked to get hold of this picture, and write it up for The Saturday or The Athenæum, when it was exhibited at the French Gallery in London; they could take credit for all the artist's thinking and inventiveness, and save their own imaginative muscle. In this "Duel," and in the "Diogenes," the Walters gallery possesses two of the most sensational and impressive of Gérôme's pictures—two that are safest from oblivion. The "Masqueraders' Duel" shows a Parisian dressed as a Pierrot killed by another costumed as an Indian chief; the murderer walks off toward the modern carriages, supported by an athletic Harlequin; while a Doge of Ven-

cemented with sweat, of toil-worn costume and lonely landscape. Again, what could be more like a literary epigram than Couture's "Liberty in Chains?" If the Gallait is a ballad, and the Gérôme a romance, this is a Juvenal-like satire. Fettered and pampered, wine-drugged and laurel-crowned, the poet of the Napoleonic dynasty sits in Roman guise; is it Ovid, who was banished for insulting the smooth and specious Augustus? At any rate, the figure of the sad minstrel, whose harp lies idle by his hand, and whose limbs clank with fetters amid a palace feast as he looks down at a useless vase filled with gold, is most conducive to literary invention; an essayist could write chapters about it.

A more strictly pictorial sentiment belongs to the subject by Jules Breton, "The Close of the Day." Two statuesque, strongly-built peasant-women, standing in the empty arena of their toil, lean on their rakes and lean toward each other, as one imagines the statues of a cathedral leaning to whisper at night; twilight closes upon the scenes of these Titanesses' labors, and the severe granitic cast of their faces and the beauty of their strong limbs take an exquisite softness as the warmer color of evening begins to play in outlines around the mighty masses of their flesh. Millet, the poet of the fields, has here a "Peasant-Woman Breaking Flax," done with his own antique wild treatment, and a masterpiece of his peculiar technic; and a "Potato Harvest," a measureless landscape, where a rain of light, sifted from the edge of a rolling cloud, defines accent after accent of a broad sad plain, stretching off endlessly, and peopled with the rows of patient diggers, while in front certain farmers' wives follow up the gatherers, or hold the coarse sacks to be filled, each figure seeming to belong to the fruitful but grimy earth, like the gods that the witch of Endor saw coming out of the ground.

Space is lacking in this article to do justice to the "Hemicycle" and several other worthy pictures.

CICERONE.

BOSTON CORRESPONDENCE.

WALTER SHIRLAW'S EXHIBITION—J. R. TILTON CRITICISED—BOIT'S WATER-COLORS—NOTES AND COMMENTS.

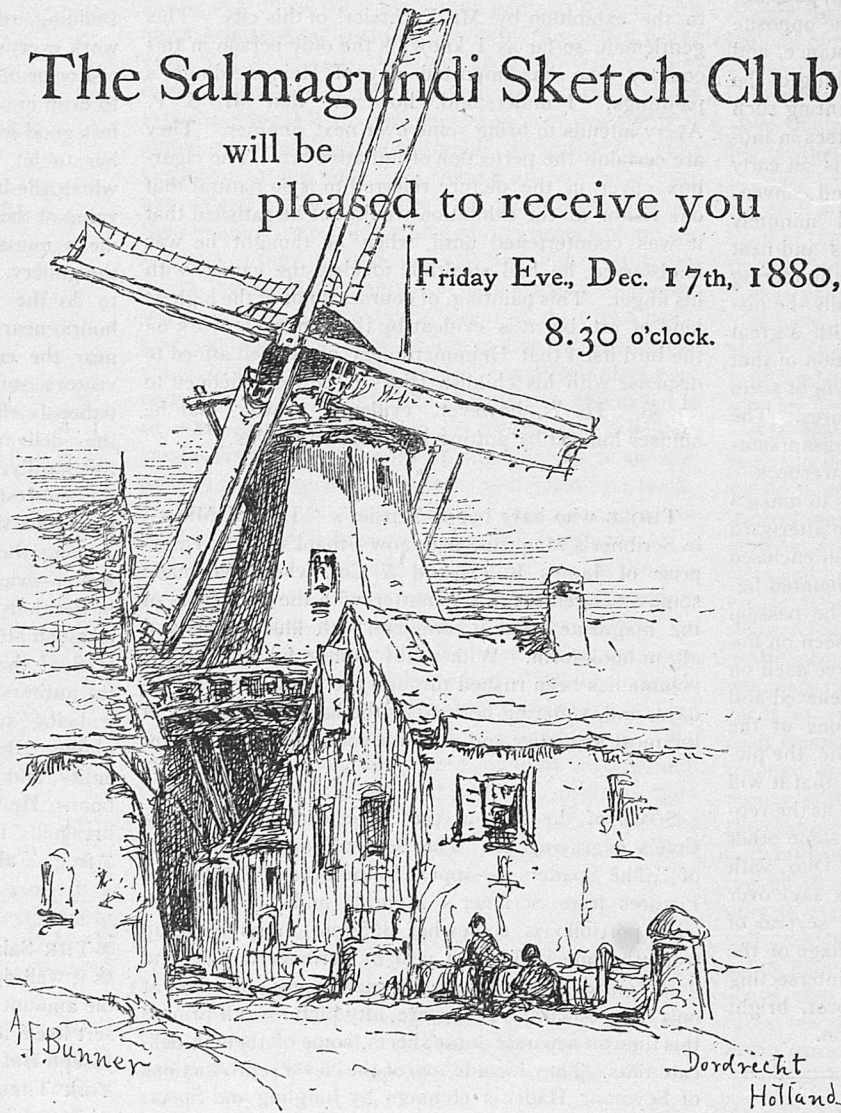
BOSTON, December 5, 1880.

ANOTHER of your leading New York artists has come to Boston, like La Farge, to make his first collective exhibition and general sale. Mr. Walter Shirlaw has just concluded an exhibition here of over a hundred of

his oil paintings and water-colors, embracing, on the one hand, his famous "Bavarian Sheep-Shearing," and, on the other, the crayon and color sketches for the grand scheme of a house decoration on which he has lately begun work. A comprehensive view has thus been obtained of the whole range of the young painter's art-life, from its first triumph and the successes preliminary thereto to the richly productive period of the present. Everybody has been surprised at the effect, the "total impression," of the collection—nobody more than the painter himself. As he says, he has for the first time obtained a good look at himself and it may well be believed that he is satisfied with this pier-glass view of his commanding and sinewy stature. His clever drawing, his brave color, his talent for composition, his graceful technique, have been duly apprec-

The Salmagundi Sketch Club will be pleased to receive you

Friday Eve., Dec. 17th, 1880,
8.30 o'clock.



SALMAGUNDI CLUB INVITATION SKETCH. BY A. F. BUNNER.

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ice and Duke of Guise, still in their finery "d'emprunt," bend over the wounded man in the cold January snow; the picture is a novel, a chapter out of some French Thackeray. The "Diogenes," a minute study of the real semblance of the great cynic, sitting in his wine-cask, surrounded by dogs even more literally cynical, and cleaning his lantern to search for an honest man, is a reality so true, so convincing, so rounded and finished and chiselled, that the eye is assured Prometheus never made men more mechanically perfect, more ready to live. The "Oubli des Douleurs," by the greatest living Belgian, described in the last article, is another painting that tells a tale, just as a piece of fine writing would do; tells a tale not merely in the invention of the main incident, but in every detail of selection, of color, of wasted cheek, of dusty feet, of hair

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